Forging the Future

Anchored in Our Past, Building on Our Present

A Summary of People's Perspectives on a Vision for the Northwest Territories and Planting the Seeds to Achieve it

Northern Leaders' Forum (NLF)

Chaired by Premier Roland, with Leaders from

Aboriginal, public, and community governments

Northern Leaders' Message

More than a year ago, leaders of Aboriginal, public, and community governments throughout the NWT created the Northern Leaders' Forum (NLF), where we set out to discover what territorial residents want to see for the Northwest Territories 20 to 30 years from now. We invited citizens to share their hopes and dreams for our territory as the foundation on which to develop a common vision and the beginnings of a roadmap for the future of the NWT. To achieve this goal, we committed to respectful government-to-government relations and to work closely together for the betterment of all territorial citizens.

During the course of 2010, several members of the NLF consulted their respective constituents. The Premier engaged in territory-wide consultations under the "Creating Our Future Together" initiative. The NWT Association of Communities sought the views of leaders and residents of all the 30 communities it represents. The Inuvialuit Regional Corporation reached out to its members for input, as did the Northwest Territory Métis Nation which conducted public opinion surveys of its membership.

NWT residents responded generously to these invitations, sharing their ideas for the future. Young and old, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, rural and urban residents painted a vibrant picture of the North they want to live in or leave as a legacy to their children. Without exception, people want to reduce disparities and increase opportunities so all residents benefit fully from the NWT's environmental health, economic wealth and social development. They also want assurance that their individual and collective rights, their cultures and lifestyles are fully protected.

Identifying shared goals was the easy part. The challenge is translating ideals into actions, ensuring that this vision of the future becomes the reality of future generations. That task rests with each and every one of us – leaders, government workers, business people, community volunteers, parents and youth. We must all be part of achieving the shared goals.

For Northern Leaders, this means we must find ways to successfully co-exist as the next chapters of the NWT's story are written. We will need to work in productive partnerships that honour and respect our diverse roles and responsibilities. This understanding includes the recognition that the collective efforts of NLF members to achieve a shared vision for the future do not prejudice other negotiations or processes. This also requires that public governments at all levels acknowledge Aboriginal governments' autonomy and the right of their citizens to determine their own destiny. This also means making a firm commitment to build healthier intergovernmental relationships. Even as we respect each other's areas of jurisdiction, we recognize that our individual activities are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Ultimately, we are all committed to a common vision of our territory's future. There is more that unites us than divides us.

This recognition plants the seeds for a promising future. While there are many voices, in the end, there must be a shared vision.

Photo courtesy of Lawrence Norbert / GTC

Back Row: left to right; Alan Heron - Northwest Territory Métis Nation, Mary Ann Ross - Vice President Gwich'in Tribal Council, Gordon Van Tighem - President NWT Association of Communities, Sam Gargan - Grand Chief Dehcho First Nations, David Krutko - MLA Mackenzie Delta, Ethel Blondin-Andrew - Chair Sahtu Secretariat Inc., David Ramsey - MLA Kam Lake.

Front Row: from left to right; Betty Villebrun - President Northwest Territory Métis Nation, Premier Floyd K. Roland, Nellie Cournoyea - Chair and CEO Inuvialuit Regional Corporation.

Our Past

Long before the Northwest Territories officially came into existence this land was already the home of Aboriginal peoples. From time immemorial, ancestors of the present day Aboriginal peoples occupied the land and governed over their affairs. The land has always been central to survival, providing food and shelter in addition to holding profound cultural and spiritual significance.

The first non-Aboriginals to arrive were most likely the Vikings around 1000 A.D. The first recorded visit was led by explorer Martin Frobisher in 1576. In 1610, the Henry Hudson landed on Arctic shores while looking for a Northwest sea passage to Asia. By 1670, the British Crown gave the Hudson's Bay Company title to Rupert's Land – the area drained by the rivers flowing into Hudson Bay – almost all of current day Canada beyond the Ontario border. Two centuries later, in 1870, the British transferred Rupert's Land to Canada, when it was renamed The North-West Territories.

The NWT has been reconfigured repeatedly over time, as the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta were created at its southern boundaries and the borders of Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec were shifted north. The most recent change came in 1999, when the new territory of Nunavut was carved out of its eastern half.

Curiosity about this iconic region has fired the imagination of generation after generation of explorers – from early adventurers and traders eager to capitalize on its wealth of natural resources, to missionaries committed to converting residents to Christianity, to contemporary scientists keen to unravel the mysteries of life. They discovered a land of harsh geography and even harsher climate with exotic flora and fauna and the most dramatic landscapes anywhere on Earth. In addition to bountiful wildlife, they uncovered metals and minerals, oil and gas on and below the land and fisheries in its lakes, rivers and ocean.

With each wave, newcomers have brought with them a new economy and way of life. Communities initially grew around trading posts, mission schools and RCMP detachments. Over time, they grew to include new mine sites, military posts and modern research centres. The pace of migration to the region accelerated dramatically in the lead-up to World War II, as mineral exploration and military activity began to play a prominent role in the NWT's development. For example, the discovery of radium and gold in the 1930s saw the population of Yellowknife quintuple from just 200 before 1930 to 1,000 by the by the mid-1940s. With the construction of a hydroelectric plant a few years later, even more people and industries were drawn to the city and region. The NWT continues to play a strategic role to this day as Canada exerts its claim to Arctic sovereignty.

Until the 1980s, the federal government appointed Commissioners to oversee government programs and services administered by Ottawa throughout the NWT. That era came to an end in 1986, with the transfer of many provincial-like powers from federal public servants to a democratically elected Legislative Assembly based in Yellowknife which has assumed greater authority and responsibility for day-to-day territorial affairs. Since the patriation of the Canadian constitution in 1982, which formally acknowledged Aboriginal and treaty rights, the negotiation and settlements of land, resources and self-government agreements by Aboriginal groups have again begun to redraw the map of the NWT.

Our Present

The NWT today is on the cusp of unprecedented economic and social development. With its extraordinary wealth of renewable and non-renewable resources, diverse population and determination to play a greater role in the Canadian federation, it has the potential to fuel nation building projects that will have profound impacts for future generations.

The NWT of 2011 is home to 43,554 residents, half of whom are Aboriginal. Nearly 60 percent of territorial residents live in urban areas, most of them in Yellowknife which is the region's capital and largest city with a population of over 19,000 people. The Territory has a total of 33 communities in all, spread over 1,300,000 square kilometres. Residents of these communities speak 11 different languages. The NWT today reflects many cultures, with newcomers from all corners of the globe. The territory currently boasts an employment rate of 70 percent, one of the highest in the country, with per capita income rates that are the envy of Canadians. In 2008, the average family income was slightly under $112,000 annually. However, an ongoing challenge remains a fair distribution of economic opportunity across the territory so that all communities have the ability to participate in the economy.

The pending devolution of federal powers over land and resource management to the territorial government, coupled with the resolution of land, resources and self-government agreements with Aboriginal groups, is creating certainty for investors. In turn, this is creating opportunity for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to participate in economic development that leads to an even higher standard of living and quality of life.

Ground-breaking private sector investments in the region since the turn of the 21st Century have seen the development of world-class diamond mines and preliminary steps to construct a massive pipeline to bring six trillion cubic feet of natural gas from the Mackenzie Delta to southern markets. A thriving tourism industry that is attracting adventure and eco-conscious travellers from around the globe is further fuelling economic and social development.

For all the benefits of this progress, however, there are also downsides to development. Many are concerned that these changes are compromising the centuries-old way of life of Aboriginal people, leading to widespread social problems. Low education levels, high levels of addiction and substance abuse, unemployment, poor housing and elevated levels of violence severely limit opportunities for too many residents of the territory. A rapidly-changing climate also poses a danger to the environment, threatening wildlife and fragile ecosystems along with residents' health. These trends underscore the need for environmental management and adaptation strategies that help NWT residents to adjust to a fast-changing world and ensure sensitive Arctic ecosystems are safeguarded for future generations.

What the future has in store for the NWT is an issue of great interest to all Canadians. The land of dancing northern lights and the midnight sun holds a special place in the hearts of Canadians. It is a place that inspires our dreams and confirms our identity as Canadians. It is a vital part of our national heritage. The NWT has played a pivotal role throughout Canada's history, projects our country's image to the world and will play in defining role in shaping our country's destiny.

Defining the vision

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the outcomes of various engagement activities undertaken by NLF members is the degree to which NWT residents and their leaders agree on what they wish for the NWT in the coming decades. Differences appear most commonly in terms of how to accomplish the vision, or what is generally referred to as the roadmap.

That said, regardless of whether one comes from a large regional centre or a remote community, whether representing government, business interests or a voluntary group, NWT residents want essentially the same things for themselves and their families.

Based on what residents had to say, the Northern Leaders' Forum has developed a common vision for the NWT to carry it forward through the next few decades.

Vision Statement

Strong northern governments working in unity to ensure the NWT in the 21st century is a place:

- where sustainable communities share financial and human resources to create economic development opportunities that enable all residents to generate wealth and reduce poverty;
- where land, resource and self-government agreements have been successfully concluded;
- where all residents of all ages have access to education, training and employment opportunities that enable them to achieve their full potential;
- where the region's wealth of renewable and non-renewable resources produce a high standard of living;
- where equitable access to social services ensures the health, safety and security of all;
- where enterprise and creativity are encouraged, hard work is rewarded and the benefits of sustainable development are universally shared;
- that preserves and promotes its environmental and cultural heritage to maintain the traditional Northern lifestyle; and,
- where differences are respected and diversity is celebrated, both within and among various groups.

Supporting this Vision with a solid roadmap

While the proposed vision describes where Northerners want to go in the future and reflects their ideals and values, it does not fully capture the wide range of objectives that have been identified as part of the development of a vision.

To understand how this vision was arrived at, it is first important to know the variables participating NLF members considered when developing it. When asked to itemize their top priorities and those of the people they represent, they identified the following key areas requiring action in support of the vision for the future:

- The economy
- Communities
- Education, training and skills development
- Land and environment
- Infrastructure
- Governance and self-determination
- Diversity and balance
- Culture and language
- People and lifestyle

Each of these areas is examined in greater detail in the pages that follow, including potential actions to advance progress in all of these areas.

Participating NLF members stressed that none of these areas can be considered in isolation. They reinforced that an integrated approach is needed to accomplish measurable progress, as all of the areas identified through the public engagement processes are interconnected.

For example, a strong economy is not possible without well-educated and skilled residents. In turn, producing a highly-educated population is not possible without improvements to the quality of northern education. Likewise, people are not motivated to pursue an education unless they see meaningful employment opportunities resulting from their investment of time and effort.

In the same way, the NWT cannot advance a progressive social agenda – from better services for pre-schoolers and seniors to new housing – without a solid economic foundation that can underwrite social investments. One area cannot be advanced without progress in another.

Likewise, NLF members cannot expect to achieve their aspirations by working independently, given this degree of interdependence. Any common vision is dependent upon all governments working together for the betterment of all residents. Collectively, Northern governments can do more and lever more than they can by working individually. The frequent competition for limited resources and authority can be distracting when trying to ensure the effective and efficient program delivery to all residents.

Participating NLF members also underlined that any vision for the future needs to be achievable, practical and, ultimately, affordable. Lofty goals can only be lifted from paper if they are realistic and if there are adequate human and financial resources to make their implementation possible. And, there needs to be a collective will to make it happen – on the part of governments, families, communities and individuals.

The Economy

Where we are now

All that Northerners hope to achieve in the coming decades depends on the assurance of a strong economic foundation. Whether the objective is to improve education, health and housing or to invest in arts and culture, communications networks, roads, ports or pipelines, the bottom line is that none of this is possible without a reliable economic base. A strong economy creates jobs and generates prosperity for residents. Equally important, it generates corporate and individual tax revenues for governments that enable them to pay for government programs that NWT residents rely on. For example, when people leave communities, local governments lose tax revenues. The GNWT loses not only tax revenues but also transfer payments from the federal government when residents leave the Territory. This loss of income limits governments' ability to provide everything from health and education programs to infrastructure development.

The economy is a tool that enables wealth creation and both economic and social development. To ensure a sustainable economy in the future, the NWT needs to have access to land and natural resources as well as a business climate conducive to investment. This requires the certainty associated with settled land claims, an efficient regulatory regime, and a lower cost of living and doing business in the North. A further priority is addressing human resource capacity issues and the current lack of economic opportunity in many smaller communities.

Participating NLF members recognized the importance of preparing young people for work in both the professions and the trades. This necessitates improvements in terms of our educational programs and outcomes. In turn, this requires changes within communities, such as greater parental support to provide an environment favourable to learning and that encourages students to stay in school.

A further obstacle to be overcome in strengthening the Northern economy is reducing the current polarization of opportunity. At the moment, most communities' largest employers are government and retail. A greater role for the private sector is needed across the NWT, in communities both large and small, to diversify the economy.

For instance, Inuvik is a logical hub for the oil and gas industry in the NWT whereas Hay River offers an ideal transportation hub for businesses importing and exporting within the Territory. Still other communities are natural sites for cultural and eco-tourism where local employment can be created in the development of traditional arts and crafts or by enticing new ventures such as film and television production.

NLF members also acknowledged the importance of improving the regulatory environment, which has the potential to slow economic growth or pose undue economic hardships for many in the region. For example, federal regulations related to transportation and the environment can negatively affect the cost of conducting business in the NWT. Northern Leaders cautioned, however, that an improved regulatory regime does not mean there should be a single regime. There must be respect for processes that are working, such as regional boards.

During public consultations and in NLF discussions, residents expressed the need to promote both renewable and non-renewable resource development – from oil and gas and mining developments, to the further development of hydro-electricity, biomass, geothermal and other renewable energy resources.

NWT residents also want to have input into decision-making related to federal legislation and regulations, which can have significant financial impacts on northern communities and businesses. Federal regulations and changes affecting transportation requiring double-hulled barges will have cost implications from the barging company to the community gas pump, as well as the costs charged for products sold to residents by local businesses. Regulations requiring northern air carriers to fly at lower altitudes to accommodate transcontinental flights cost northern airlines millions in additional fuel costs. Participating NLF members called for a common sense approach to such decisions, recognizing there needs to be a reasonable balance because of the costs associated with them.

Both Northern Leaders and residents called for healthy, measured and sustainable economic development that respects the land and the Northern lifestyle to ensure future generations will still enjoy all that makes the NWT a unique and special place to live. Participating NLF members expressed the need for increased capacity to cope with large scale developments. Equally important, they underscored that there must be an ongoing and central role for the traditional economy.

The road forward...

Action on multiple fronts will be needed to strengthen the NWT economy. Among the priorities:

- Identify and address barriers to developing human resource capacity (education, housing)
- Adopt creative approaches to building skills and capacity, learning from the experience with diamond mining industries
- Industry and the GNWT should work with community governments potentially affected by major resource development projects to identify options to ensure responsible development, mitigate infrastructure impacts and maximize opportunities (e.g. GNWT departments provide analytical tools and information on smart practices)
- Ensure governments and industry are better prepared for oil and gas exploration and development by:
    - Being anticipatory regarding issues related to oil and gas exploration and other resource developments, addressing those issues prior to resource development activity
    - Enabling time-efficient decision-making by regulators by providing accurate traditional and scientific information and recommendations
    - Improve the regulatory regime – but not necessarily a single board or single approach
    - Greater NWT involvement in regulatory decision making that directly impacts Northern businesses
- Diversify the economy beyond non-renewable resource development including:
    - Large scale undertakings like the Mackenzie Valley Highway construction, hydro development, tourism and Northern recycling facilities
    - Medium scale economic development such as vibrant film and cultural industries that showcase the NWT's cultural diversity and make it a magnet for visual and performing arts, music and literature
    - Small scale activities including local gardening, farming, fishing and forestry operations, and handicraft production for the tourism trade
- Promote the NWT as an exciting place to visit for cultural/heritage experiences as well as adventure and eco-tourism activities
- Provide greater support for small business, such as assistance to tourism operators to better market the NWT to domestic and international travellers
- Generate more agricultural activity and value-added food production
- Develop a green economy built on biomass, geothermal technology, solar and wind power
- Relocate government programs and jobs from Yellowknife and other regional centres to smaller communities to generate local employment
- Provide information on best business practices, including the start up, running and expansion of businesses
- Capitalize on communities' strategic strengths to create more jobs (e.g. Inuvik as a hub for the oil and gas sector)
- Encourage Northerners to shop locally, supporting area businesses

Infrastructure

Where we are now

Directly linked to economic progress is infrastructure development. Participating NLF members recognized the need for infrastructure that meets the needs of both communities and industry, and that is durable, affordable, well maintained, environmentally appropriate and resilient in the face of changing climate conditions.

NWT governments, especially communities, face numerous challenges with respect to infrastructure, in part due to the fact that all communities throughout the NWT require basic municipal infrastructure such as roads, water systems and community centres. The high costs associated with construction and maintenance, coupled with geographic isolation, a harsh climate and the increasing impacts of climate change, put further strains on limited budgets. Permafrost degradation, changing snow loads, changing water flows and shoreline erosion all threaten existing infrastructure, and require the development of new approaches to create infrastructure resilient enough to withstand changing conditions.

Sound and reliable infrastructure is essential to attract economic investment and to ensure safe, healthy living environments for residents. NWT residents need, and expect, transportation infrastructure of a national standard to promote economic development, link communities and reduce the cost of living.

Among the improvements needed to fulfill the future vision is the completion of the Mackenzie Valley Highway which will drive the Territory's economy by making development more accessible and affordable. The construction of a north-south highway is vital to improve access to the NWT's oil and gas, minerals and metals, and lakes and rivers with hydroelectric power potential as well as to open up the Territory to domestic tourists and travellers from all corners of the globe.

Improved infrastructure will increase connections among communities, reducing living costs for residents while making businesses more competitive, and creating meaningful opportunities to diversify the economy in many remote communities. The Mackenzie Valley Highway will also assist in adapting to changing climactic conditions. An all-weather link through the Mackenzie Valley would alleviate the increasing problems associated with reduced winter road reliability and reduced periods of operation.

Improved transportation infrastructure will also help the NWT to deal with natural disasters and environmental emergencies that could potentially take place in the Mackenzie Valley and along the Arctic Coast. Not to be overlooked, investment in the NWT's transportation infrastructure is an effective demonstration of Canada's sovereignty.

The NWT needs investments in digital infrastructure as well. Territory-wide broadband coverage and better telecommunications infrastructure that connects Northerners, as well as the NWT with the south and the wider world, will lead to increased cohesion and collaboration among communities.

Equally valuable, it will create economic opportunities that enable Northern businesses to overcome the traditional challenges of geographic isolation and the high costs associated with it.

The road forward...

A variety of constructive ideas could help to address the challenges and take advantage of opportunities associated with infrastructure development, such as:

- Secure federal financial backing to complete the Mackenzie Valley Highway to spur job creation and social development, diversify the NWT economy, respond to climate change challenges and assert Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic
- Move forward with the Mackenzie Valley Gas Pipeline to create thousands of jobs and billions in economic activity throughout the NWT and all across Canada to increase territorial self-sufficiency, improve the standard of living of all NWT residents, respond to public demand for cleaner energy and a lower carbon-based economy, and strengthen the NWT's contributions to the Canadian federation
- Acquire federal support for strategic investments in NWT hydroelectric development and modernize the electricity transmission network to provide a green, reliable, affordable energy source that can lengthen the life of existing mines and make proposed mining projects more viable and potentially fuel downstream manufacturing initiatives, as well as decrease Northern reliance on diesel fuel, thereby reducing the cost of living and doing business in the NWT and helping Canada to achieve its greenhouse gas reduction goals
- Capitalize on funding partnerships, such as community and Aboriginal governments working with the federal government and GNWT to develop shared infrastructure, achieving economies of scale for both construction and maintenance
- Ensure more effective use of flexible federal funding arrangements that are more responsive to community needs (e.g. the Gas Tax)
- Realize the potential for multi-purpose facilities (e.g. facilities which house an arena, fitness centre, swimming pool, and conference centre) to reduce construction and maintenance costs
- Explore innovative financing mechanisms, such as bundling several water treatment plant projects into one contractual arrangement
- Implement shared maintenance resources among communities to reduce costs and increase service stability
- Implement shared project management resources to address capacity challenges in communities and to reduce the administrative burden associated with project development
- Establish collaborative mechanisms to advance codes, standards and practices for Northern infrastructure
- Develop climate change adaptation and mitigation measures for existing infrastructure
- Partner with industry to develop shared service agreements, training programs, collaborative infrastructure development and/or legacy infrastructure

Education, training and skills development

Where we are now

From youth to Elders, there was near unanimous agreement that educated people, healthy in body, mind and spirit, make greater contributions to their families, communities and the economy.

Strengthening educational opportunities and outcomes for residents is also key to attracting investments and economic development. Industry depends on skilled and educated people with the capacity to address challenges and develop solutions that meet businesses' needs – promoting prosperity for industry, revenues for governments and wealth for individual residents.

Participating NLF members observed that ensuring NWT residents are equipped with the education they will need 20 to 30 years from now requires that action be taken immediately to focus on the needs of today's infants and toddlers. Early childhood education was cited frequently as a priority by residents participating in the various public engagement processes. The observation was made that, without skilled and educated youth, the potential of realizing the collective vision will be seriously undermined.

Another frequent issue that arose during consultations and at the NLF table is the need to improve the delivery of education and to ensure the curriculum is both relevant to, and reflective of, the Northern reality.

Concerns were raised about the practice of social passing, which many believe does a disservice to the student as well as the Territory at large. Also important is the need to recognize that learning, training and skills development extends beyond the classroom to include the home and the community. Still others highlighted the need for flexibility in applying government policies in recognition of the challenges of delivering quality education in remote communities.

The road forward...

An array of progressive steps will take the NWT closer to its vision, including:

- Invest in early childhood learning programs to get young children off to a good start
- Families take more responsibility for the upbringing of their children, making sure they get to school ready to learn and are encouraged to achieve their potential
- Develop culturally relevant and quality northern curriculum that utilizes the NWT's natural assets and which reflects the Territory's history, peoples, cultures and languages
- Improve literacy and numeracy rates to increase academic success
- Increase Aboriginal language instruction and institute Aboriginal language immersion programs
- Offer alternative, hands-on learning to keep kids in school and help them develop practical skills that preserve traditional knowledge and promote the traditional economy

- Employ more Aboriginal and Northern teachers
- Provide cultural sensitivity and awareness training for newcomers who teach in the NWT
- Take a hard line on policies such as absenteeism, implementing and enforcing children's right to education by making parents aware of their obligations and supporting and encouraging them to send their children to school
- Promote on-line education enabled by technology
- Establish a university in the NWT so youth no longer need to leave the Territory and to make post-secondary education more accessible to more residents
- Maximize training opportunities for youth and adults flowing from development projects in partnership with Aboriginal groups, industry and government (e.g. the diamond mines model)
- Elders and seniors play a greater leadership and mentorship role among NWT youth
- Cultivate research, partnerships, and development expertise in the NWT which marries traditional and contemporary scientific knowledge
- Provide affordable and adequate housing to reduce high turnover rates among professionals, especially in smaller communities

Culture and language

Where we are now

Culture and language are closely tied to education and are integral to achieving the vision. Aboriginal cultures, languages and traditions contribute to the rich social fabric of the Territory and support the overall well-being of individuals. Yet, a rapidly-changing Northern society makes it increasingly difficult for Aboriginal residents of the NWT to preserve their cultural identity and values, which is crucial to their individual and community well-being. It is essential that cultural values, traditional skills and languages be incorporated into mainstream NWT society so that individuals can "have their feet in both worlds" as one Elder said during the consultations.

Participating NLF members, as well as many residents, recommended that the NWT's approach to education be improved to ensure a stronger relationship between Aboriginal cultures and education. For instance, science curriculum should study Northern biology or the effects of climate change. As well, culture and the northern way of life should be fully integrated into various aspects of the curriculum, from history to geography to language arts, rather than focusing solely on "on the land" camps in which students participate for as little as a day.

Northern Leaders emphasized that traditional knowledge and skills must be reinforced and passed on, not only through the educational system, but also through families and the home. They acknowledged, however, that financial pressures make it very difficult for some to maintain traditional practices. Single mothers, as an example, often don't have the financial resources to get out on the land and set up camps. Yet, without such experiences which increase familiarity with the land and the environment, young peoples' connection to the land and culture is diminished.

Of course, language and cultural concerns are not confined to Aboriginal residents. Ensuring a welcoming environment and the inclusion of the global community and improving our multicultural society is vital to the social and economic well-being of the Territory as it moves ahead.

The road forward...

The NWT must build on the strengths of the past at the same time that it embraces the new face of the future. Some of the ways this can be achieved include:

- Implement long-term plans for research, development, and promotion of Aboriginal languages and culture
- Develop Northern-based school curriculum that reflects the Northern geo-physical and cultural reality
- Integrate traditional and contemporary scientific knowledge in the classroom
- Promote and protect Aboriginal languages through initiatives such as immersion programs
- Support participation in the traditional harvest for children and youth to learn and experience their culture, language and traditions
- Promote strong Aboriginal cultures and values to restore the health of families and communities and to create avenues for individuals to pursue employment linked to the traditional economy
- Embrace cultural diversity, for its own sake, and as a way to create economic opportunity
- Develop a shared northern 'identity' that celebrates diversity and is inclusive of all
- Support artists of all descriptions and showcase the NWT's cultural diversity

Land and environment

Where we are now

Closely connected to strengthening the NWT's cultural heritage is safeguarding the land and the environment. Few things matter more to residents of the NWT than ensuring that the land, water and wildlife are protected and the Northern lifestyle preserved.

Whether young or old, living in regional centres or small communities, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, residents of the Territory are clear. They want the assurance that, 20 to 30 years from now, the NWT will continue to be a pristine place with clean air, fresh water and healthy animal populations. They also want to make sure traditional lifestyles are maintained so people can continue to live off the land. In short, residents want to ensure that economic development is successfully balanced with conservation.

The road forward...

Development decisions must be grounded in the principles of sustainable development which integrate and simultaneously promote environmental protection and social and economic progress:

- Promote energy efficiency and renewable (sustainable) energy
- Develop appropriate technologies that address the unique environmental challenges and conditions in the North
- Assist communities in identifying impacts and opportunities associated with climate change, including the development of mitigation strategies
- Generate scientific and socio-economic information and utilize traditional knowledge to enable sound decisions
- Improve regulatory and environmental assessment processes and timelines
- Examine past experiences, such as those related to mining that left a damaging legacy, and develop strategies to avoid a repeat of adverse experiences in the future
- Protect the land through initiatives such as the Protected Areas Strategy
- Restore land to its natural state through reclamation
- Implement effective environmental laws within the NWT
- Work in partnership with the federal government to ensure federal regulatory requirements reflect and are responsive to Northern needs

Governance and self-determination

Where we are now

Aboriginal peoples in all regions of the NWT have secured processes to clarify their Aboriginal rights over land, resources and governance which will result in constitutionally protected agreement. The finalization and implementation of land, resources and self-government agreements are an essential element in building a solid foundation upon which mutually respectful intergovernmental relations can be built. Any partnership arrangements between Aboriginal and public governments must, therefore, honour each government's level of autonomy. However, autonomy does not mean that governments should or cannot work together. On the contrary, they need to embrace the reality that they co-exist and need to work constructively side by side. No one government can go it alone. Effective intergovernmental relations and arrangements need to be established to maximize finite resources and provide the best possible programs to our residents.

This, in turn, will require strong and effective partnerships built on respect and trust – a key expectation of NWT residents which surfaced repeatedly in the consultations. Positive intergovernmental relationships will be especially important to avoid the risk of unnecessary duplication and overlap among government structures. In 20 to 30 years, the Territory needs strengthened and supportive public and Aboriginal government relations because governments can achieve more and lever more working collectively than they can individually.

Care must be taken as well in implementing already settled land, resources and self-government agreements to ensure that the parties uphold the spirit and intent of what has been painstakingly negotiated for years.

NWT residents also made the point repeatedly that they want to be full and meaningful participants in decisions that affect them in order to make a better life for themselves, their families and communities. They recognize that self-government and devolution are the keys to achieving this objective.

There was near unanimous agreement – echoed by participating NLF members – that the Territory needs to reduce its dependence on the federal government.

However, governments and communities face continual challenges in recruiting and retaining the staff they require to manage change and to achieve self-sufficiency and self-determination. Having a home-grown pool of highly-skilled and educated workers will enable individuals and the NWT as a whole to play a greater role in determining its destiny, thereby ensuring that decisions about the North are made by Northerners in the future.

A consistent message throughout the numerous public engagement activities was the call for less conflict among various levels of government within the NWT and between NWT governments and the federal government. NLF members pointed to the success of current partnerships among public and Aboriginal governments, including land claims organizations. Collaborative approaches to wildlife management, as an example, demonstrate how governments in the Territory can work effectively together.

NLF members noted, however, that evolving relationships between Aboriginal governments and organizations and the federal and territorial governments should not be used as an opportunity for the GNWT to withdraw funding in areas it currently underwrites, once land claims and self-government claims are settled. They also underscored that, after devolution is finalized, the GNWT should not assume additional responsibilities currently within the federal domain as Aboriginal governments will have an ongoing fiduciary and other constitutional relationships with the Crown that must continue to be honoured.

The road forward...

Any actions taken with respect to governance must be based on a mutual recognition of Aboriginal rights to land, resources and governance and a territorial government serving and representing all residents of the NWT.

The challenge ahead is to strike a fine balance between their respective levels of autonomy and the need to work in unity for the betterment of all residents. However, such efforts – like this document – are not in any way meant to prejudice existing processes.

A range of constructive ideas can help all governments operating in the NWT to more fully respond to the needs and expectations of their constituents, including:

- Conclude land, resources and self-government agreements
- Fully implement existing land, resources and self-government agreements
- Build a foundation for governance based on mutual respect for one another's area of jurisdiction
- Explore and establish opportunities for intergovernmental partnerships focused on capacity building as well as shared infrastructure and joint program and service arrangements
- Conclude a fair devolution agreement
- Build governance capacity through training for elected officials to ensure they fully understand their roles and responsibilities
- Increase information sharing and networking among Northern governments
- Build a shared skilled, competent public service for the NWT, particularly in high demand fields such as administration, finance and information technology
- Support transfer agreements for staff between governments, to provide employees with the opportunity to broaden their experience and share their skills
- Combine resources and expertise in areas such as recruitment and marketing
- Market the public service as a career for NWT youth
- Northern Leaders serve as role models and mentors, creating opportunities for the next generation of leaders to gain experience and acquire skills so they can contribute to decision making
- Greater accountability and fiscal responsibility on the part of governments
- Make housing available for public sector employees in remote communities
- Flexible funding arrangements amongst governments, including the federal government
- Increased influence on federal policies, directions and decisions that affect the NWT
- Increase co-operation among governments, NGOs and the private sector
- Reduce dependence on government through a stronger economy and social programs that encourage people to make productive choices

People and lifestyle

Where we are now

Residents who took part in the consultations – along with NLF members – want an NWT in which self-sufficient individuals rely less on government supports and more on their own strengths and skills. They want a future where crime and abuse are no longer issues, the cost of living is affordable, adequate housing is widely available, children and families receive the support they need to enjoy a good quality of life, those with special needs have them attended to, supported by active volunteers, and good jobs are created by Northern companies that operate in the best interests of all residents of the Territory.

The road forward...

Action will be required on multiple fronts – social and economic, and involving the public, private and voluntary sectors – to enable people to overcome their challenges and capitalize on their strengths so they can realize their full potential. Such activities include:

- Implement an Anti-Poverty Strategy for the NWT
- Ensure adequate and affordable housing for all residents
- Ensure reasonable access to a full range of essential health and social services, including home care for seniors
- Promote healthy lifestyles by providing an environment where people are able to make productive and healthy lifestyle choices and have the opportunity to be meaningful participants in the economy and society
- Increase understanding and awareness of healthy lifestyles among residents, particularly families, to support wise choices
- Increase cooperation among social agencies to better coordinate socio-economic programs and services
- Establish stable and effective health care treatment plans, programs and facilities within and/or close to communities
- Empower local communities to own, design, and manage socio-economic programs and services that affect them
- Capitalize on the skills and strengths of the voluntary sector
- Recognize and celebrate the contributions of NWT volunteers
- Promote partnerships so community governments can work with other government agencies to tackle social issues collectively
- Promote partnerships with the non-profit sector to maximize the contributions of community stakeholders
- Promote partnerships with the private sector, such as corporate sponsorships for recreational facilities as well as sport, cultural and educational activities
- Ensure governments provide appropriate funding and support
- Increase resources and capacity to prepare for the socio-economic impacts of development projects

From Vision to Action

Turning the proposed vision from ideals into concrete action is not the sole domain of Northern governments. No single government has the necessary resources or capacity to make the hopes and dreams of NWT residents a reality.

What is required is the ongoing input and active participation of the full spectrum of decision-makers across the Territory, including Northern governments as well as communities, the private and voluntary sectors and individual residents. The road ahead belongs to all Territorial residents, who all have a responsibility to help construct it.

NWT youth, in particular, need to play a central role, in that it is they who will inherit – and live with – the decisions taken today about what the NWT should look like tomorrow. Youth must be active participants in shaping the vision and identifying the necessary actions that will ultimately make it a reality over the coming decades. This requires that youth have a voice in future discussions and decision making.

This document is the starting point for further conversations about what those next steps should be and how NLF members and their constituents can, collectively, advance these ideas and develop an action plan to carry the vision forward.

This report is meant to stimulate additional ideas and to help representatives of public government, Aboriginal governments, communities, the private sector and non-governmental organizations to bring together the roadmap that will get the NWT on the path to the future our residents want.

Forging the Future

Anchored in Our Past,

Building on Our Present

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